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Senators hear local views on statewide graduation requirements

LANSING — Members of the Senate Education Committee today heard from Muskegon-area parents, educators and others regarding their opinions about proposed statewide graduation requirements.

"I am very encouraged by the amount of interest in this important issue," said Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores, who invited the committee to come to the Muskegon area. "For this proposal to succeed, it is critical that we have broad support from all those who will be affected by the changes. From the comments received today, it appears that we are moving in the right direction."

The Senate is considering a plan from the state superintendent and State Board of Education that would implement graduation requirements beyond the half year of civics class now required.

"The feedback we heard today helps us consider this extensive change to the education Michigan students receive," said Senate Education Committee Chairman Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland. "I look forward to hearing more from people throughout the state."

The state board's plan would require:

- Four years of English;
- Four years of math, including Algebra I and II, and geometry;
- Three years of science, including a year of biology, and either physics or chemistry;
- Three years of social science, including half-year each of civics and economics, and a year each of U.S. and world history;
- Two years of foreign language;
- One year of health and physical education; and,
- One year of visual or performing arts.

Michigan is among a handful of states that have no or almost no statewide graduation requirements. In Michigan, graduation requirements are left to local school boards. If the proposal goes into effect, the state would be a national leader in having among the most rigorous graduation requirements.

The committee will convene its next graduation requirements hearing at 7 p.m., Feb. 9 at the Kent County Intermediate School District, 1655 E. Beltline NE in Grand Rapids.